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# The Problem of Population Adjustments in Miner County

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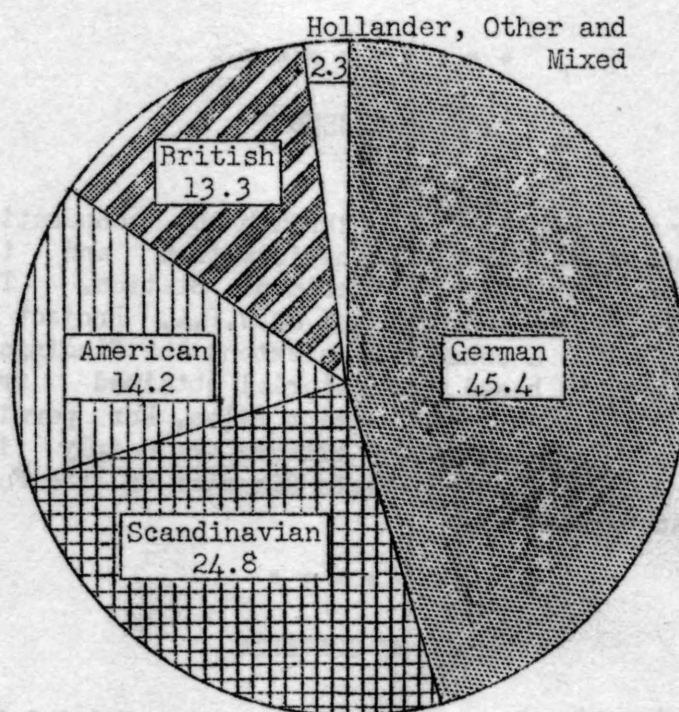
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THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION ADJUSTMENTS  
in  
Miner County

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Nationality of Farm Household Heads  
in Miner County, 1938



In order to understand the social interactions of any population group, one must know their nationality background. Differences in work customs, educational traditions, recreational interests, neighborhood persistence, religious beliefs, agricultural practices, thrift and frugality, progressive tendencies, and other activities and attitudes can be partially explained by variations in nationality background.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE

During recent years the following significant changes have occurred in the composition and distribution of population in Miner county: the total population has declined; the proportion in the younger age groups has decreased while the proportion in the older age groups has increased; the sex ratio has become more nearly equal; the percentage of foreign born has decreased; the birth rate has been sharply curtailed; and tenancy has increased. Some of these changes have come about as adjustments to changing social and economic conditions. Because a lag always exists between a changing population pattern and long established social institutional patterns, it is now recognized that some of these population changes call for widespread social readjustment.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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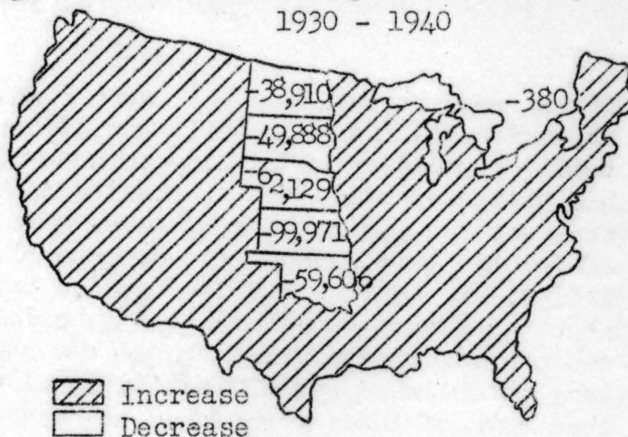
# The Problem of Population Adjustments in Miner County

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## Introductory Statement

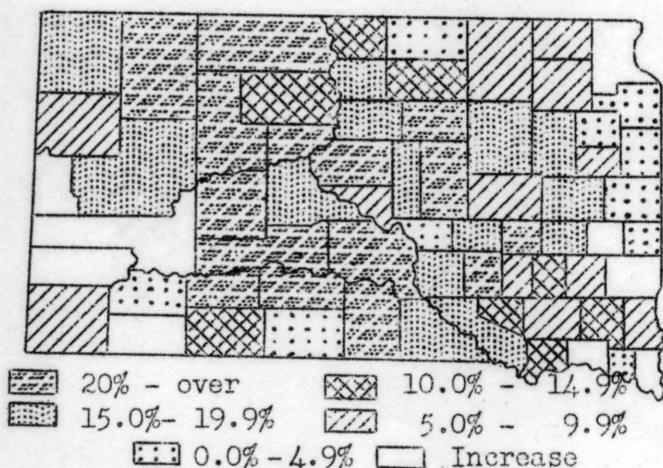
Final releases of the 1940 census reveal the fact that only six states experienced population decreases during the decade 1930-1940. The location of these states is shown in Figure 1. Except for Vermont (which suffered a negligible loss of 380 persons) these states form a north-south band across central United States in what is known as the Great Plains area. A region of relatively light rainfall even in normal times, it was hardest hit by the severe drouth of the 1930's. In each of the five states precipitation was below the normal figure in at least seven of the ten years.

Figure 1. States Showing Decreased Population, 1930 - 1940



South Dakota received only 82 percent normal rainfall during this period--a figure lower than that for any of the other Great Plains states. Precipitation was below normal in each of the ten years, with the drouth taking rank as the most severe and prolonged since 1890, the year in which the weather records were first kept. In 1934 when precipitation reached an all-time low of 13.2 inches for the state, crop failure amounted to nearly 100 percent in over two-thirds of the counties.

Figure 2. Gains or Losses in South Dakota's Population by Counties, 1930-40



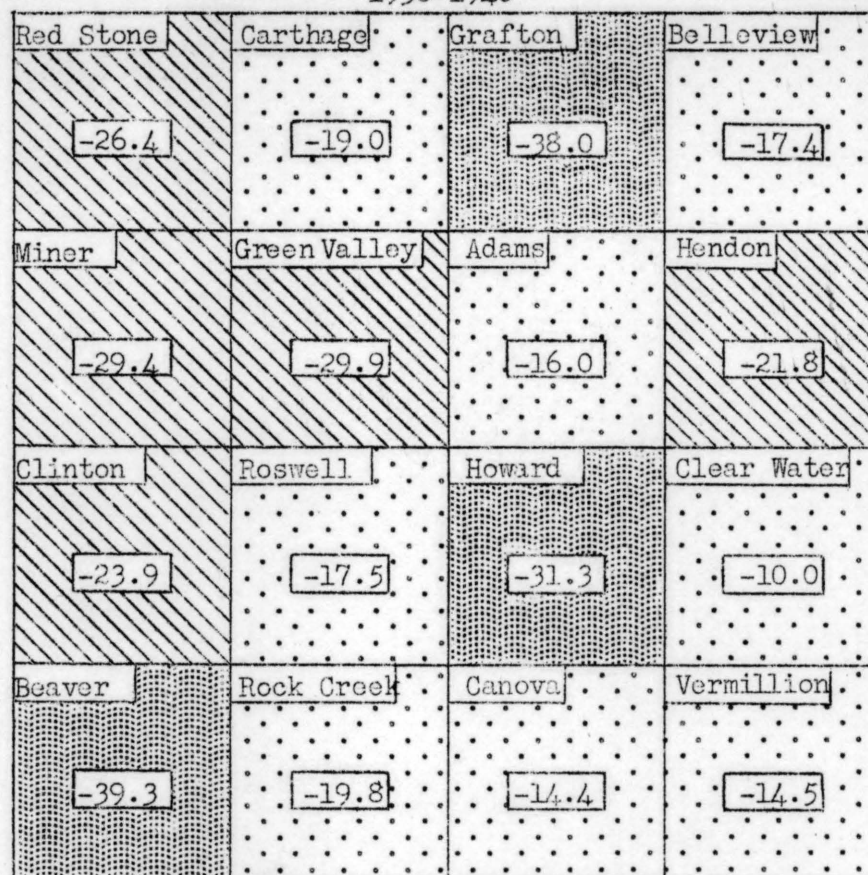
These conditions not only caused many families to leave the state but also resulted in heavy relief loads. Between July, 1933, and June, 1935 South Dakota led all other states in the percentage of its population on Federal relief.\*

Population losses varied considerably among counties of the state, as shown in Figure 2. Sixty of the 69 counties lost in population, with losses ranging from less than 2 percent to over 30 percent. In Miner county the population decline amounted to 18.4 percent. It will be noted that the central and western counties (the Black Hills area excluded) where the drought was

most pronounced, suffered the heaviest losses. These same counties had the highest per capita expenditures for relief.

\* Kumlien, W. F., A Graphic Summary of the Relief Situation in South Dakota 1930-1935, Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin Number 310, South Dakota State College, Brookings, South Dakota

Figure 3. Farm Population Losses in Miner County by Townships, 1930-1940



Legend: Lost 10.0% - 19.9% Lost 20.0 - 29.9% Lost 30.0 - 39.9%

Source: Final Releases of 1940 U. S. Census

Between 1930 and 1940 the population of Miner county declined by more than fifteen hundred persons. Since there was a loss of 978 persons between 1930 and 1935, it would seem that outward migration prior to 1935 accounted for most of this loss. Part of the decline, however, has doubtless been due to the falling birth rate. Figure 3 shows the percentage change of the farm population in each township. Losses were general throughout the county, ranging from 10.0 percent in Clear Water township to 39.3 percent in Beaver township. Half of the townships lost over one-fourth of their numbers and decreases ranged from one-tenth to nearly one-fourth in the other half.

Table 1 shows the growth and decline of the population in Miner county from 1890-1940. For three decades, 1890-1920 there was a steady growth in population. One ten-year period, 1900-1910 showed a 30.6 percent increase. The effect of drouth and depression is revealed in the 18.4 percent loss that occurred between 1930-1940, reducing the population below that of 1910.

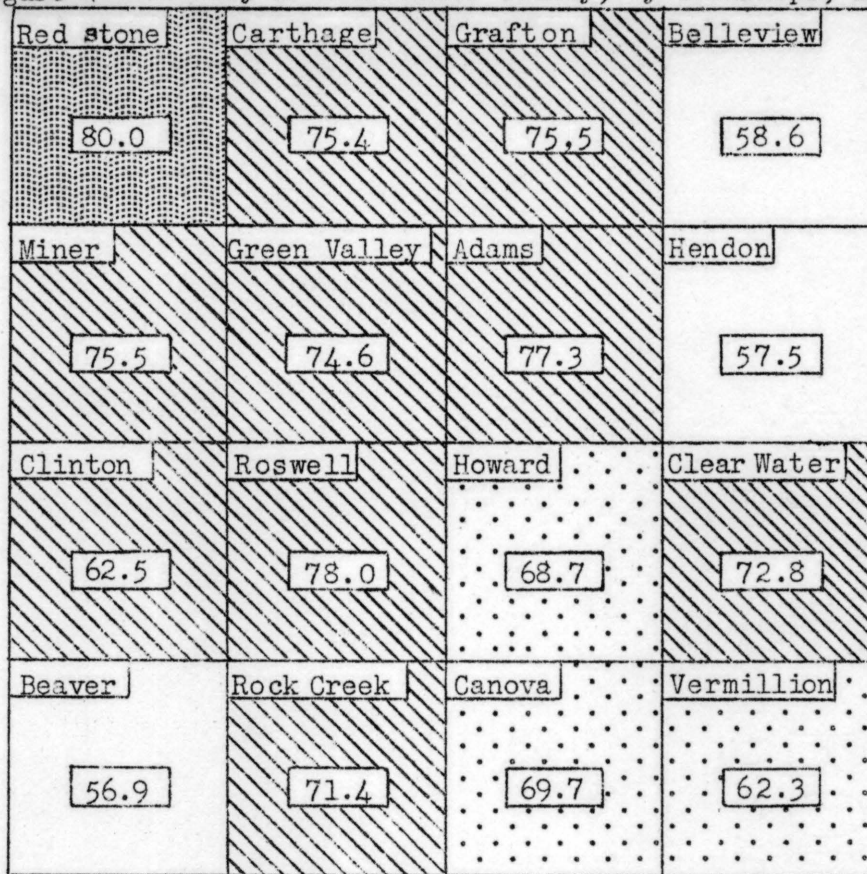
Table 1. Total Population and Increase or Decrease by Decades in Miner County, 1890-1940

Year	Total Population	Increase or Decrease	Percent Increase or Decrease
1940	6,836	-1,540	-18.4
1930	8,376	- 184	- 2.1
1920	8,560	899	11.7
1910	7,661	1,797	30.6
1900	5,864	699	13.5
1890	5,165	---	---

Source: Reports of the United States Census Bureau



Figure 4. Tenancy Rate in Miner County, by Townships, 1938



Legend: 50.0-59.9% 60.0-69.9% 70.0-79.9% 80.0% and over

Source: Farm Security Records supplemented by other sources

According to the 1940 U. S. Agricultural census report 66.9 percent of all farm operators in Miner county were tenants. A survey conducted in 1938 showed 1,043 farm operators; of these 726 or 69.6 percent were tenants and 317 or 30.4 percent were owners. Figure 4 shows the distribution of tenancy among the townships of Miner county in 1938, which varied from 56.9 percent in Beaver township to 80 percent in Redstone township. In 9 of the townships 70 percent or more of the operators were listed as tenants.

Table 2 shows two important developments, a continuous increase in the tenancy rate from 10.9 in 1890 to 66.9 percent in 1940, and the recent trend toward increased size of farms. The latter appears to be desirable as it indicates an essential adjustment to a farm unit adequate for the support of a family, however, the increase in tenancy is not so desirable. In areas where the tenancy is high, social organizations tend to be weaker and less stable than in localities where owners predominate, chiefly because of the insecurity of the renters tenure. There is less interest in conserving land resources and making needed improvements. Non-resident landlords are chiefly interested in the return from the farm and oppose community betterment insofar as it raises taxes.

Table 2. Trends in Tenancy Rate, Number of Farms and Average Size of Farms in Miner County, 1890 - 1940

Year	Tenancy Rate	Number of Farms	Average Size (in acres)
1940	66.9	1,095	304.8
1930	53.6	1,261	274.5
1920	47.4	1,153	292.4
1910	37.8	1,089	303.0
1900	22.1	924	357.2
1890	10.9	1,059	117.4

Source: U. S. Census Reports

Figure 5. Leading Nationalities\* of Farm Operators in Miner County by townships, 1938

Redstone	Carthage	Grafton	Belleview
Scand. 36.4 German 25.4	Scand. 43.9 German 26.3 Amer. 21.0	Scand. 49.0 German 32.1	Scand. 57.1 German 34.3
Miner	Green Valley	Adams	Henden
German 34.0 Amer. 30.2 British 26.4	German 42.9 Amer. 20.6	Scand. 28.0 German 49.3	Scand. 49.3 German 37.0
Clinton	Roswell	Howard	Clear Water
German 32.1 British 32.1	German 49.2	German 67.2	German 60.5
Beaver	Rock Creek	Canova	Vermillion
German 39.2 Amer. 25.5 British 27.5	German 63.6	German 71.0	Scand. 40.2 German 40.3

\* All Nationalities comprising 20 percent or more of the Farm operators.

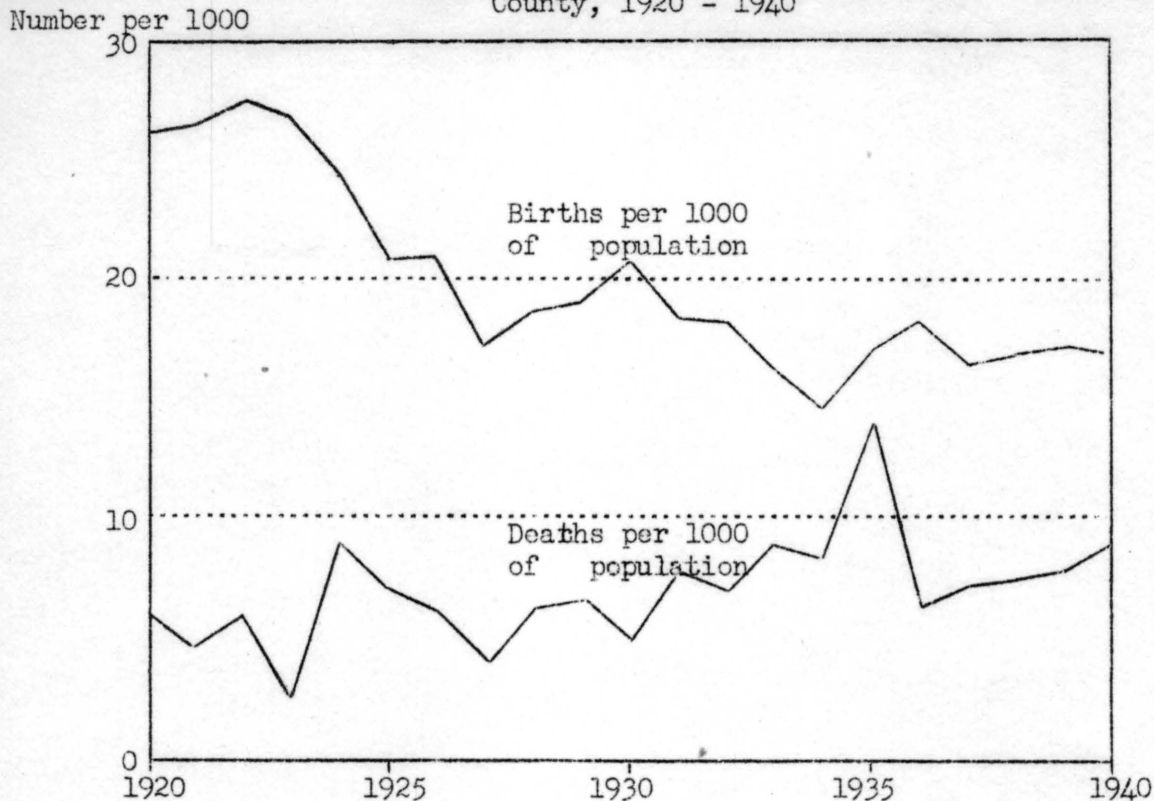
Source: Farm Security Records, supplemented by other sources.

Figure 5 shows the nationality make-up of the farm population in each of the townships of Miner county. The Germans, Scandinavians, American and British make up 97.7 percent of the farm operators (see outside cover). The Germans are the most numerous group in eleven of the sixteen townships in the county (it shared this distinction with the British in one of these and with the Scandinavians in another) while the Scandinavians are more numerous in the other five.

As previously noted, nationality background is an important factor in determining the habits, attitudes, and customs of a group. Variations in work customs, in educational traditions, in recreational interests, in neighborhood persistence, in religious beliefs and affiliations, in agricultural practices, in thrift and frugality, in progressiveness and in many other customs and practices can be partially attributed to the difference in the cultural background of various nationalities.

One of the significant relationships revealed by this study is that which exists between nationality and denominational preference. The Scandinavians are predominantly Lutheran (72.2 percent)--that of their native land; the Germans are mainly Catholic and Lutheran. The British prefer the Catholic church in greater numbers than any other denomination, although the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches enlist considerable numbers from among the German group. The American and mixed groups are rather evenly divided among the major denominations. Since these groups are made up of those who no longer trace their nationality back to the country of origin, one may believe that with the passing of time and merging of culture patterns, distinct nationality characteristics--church preference and others--tend to disappear.

Figure 6. Number of Births and Deaths Per 1000 of the Population in Miner County, 1920 - 1940



Source: Reports of the State Board of Health

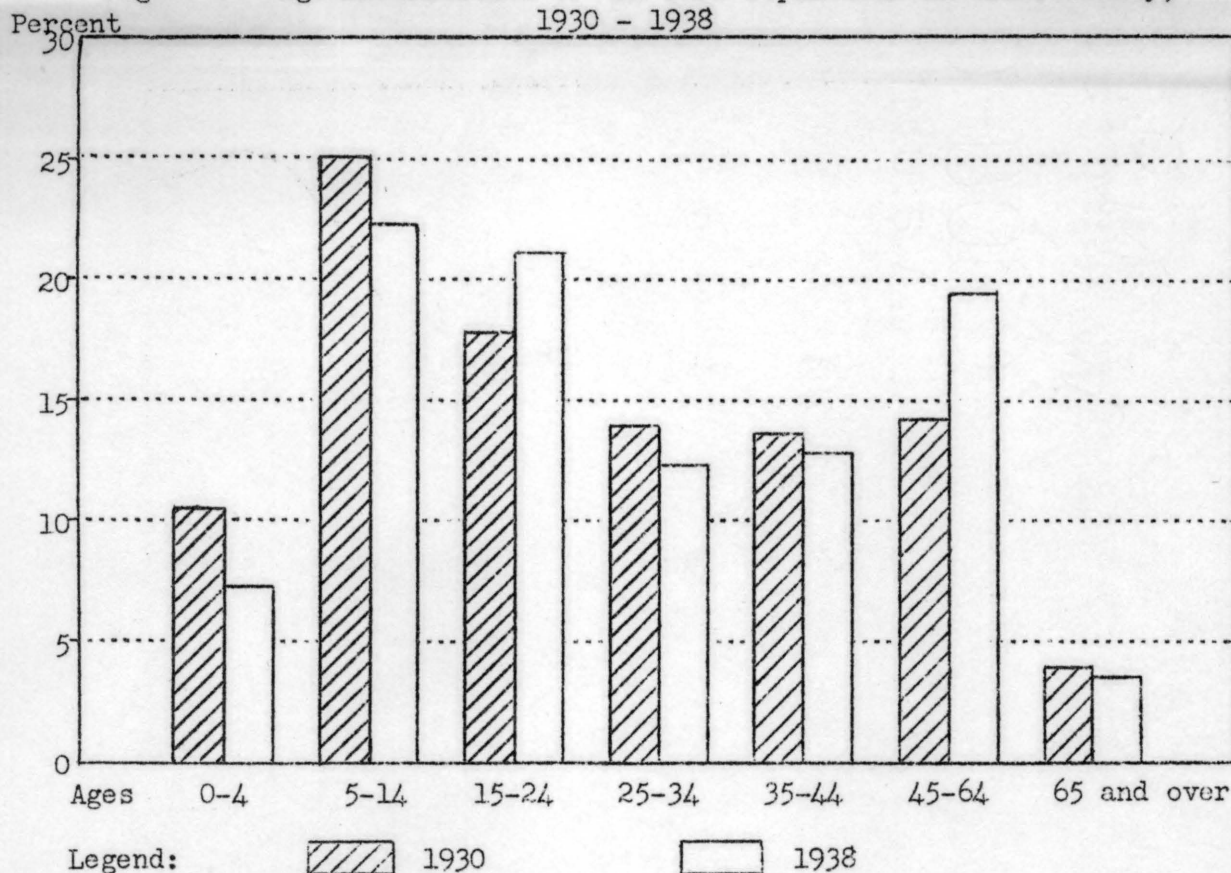
Figure 6 shows the trend in birth and death rates in Miner county, 1920-1940. It will be noted that the two rates are approaching some degree of equality. This situation is resulting from a marked decline in the birth rate and the fact that the death rate is no longer decreasing, but actually appears to be turning upward. The average death rate for the period 1920-1924 was 5.9 while the average rate for 1936-1940 was 7.6 deaths per 1000 of the population. The birth rate has fallen from 26.2 births per 1000 of the population in 1920 to 16.8 births per 1000 of the population in 1940. Because the number of births in any given year may not represent fairly the prevailing level of the birth rate, a five year average for the beginning and the end of the period has been used for comparative purposes. For the interval 1920-24, the average was 26.3 births per 1000 of the population, while during 1936-1940 the average had dropped to only 17.2. Since the population is gradually aging and medical science has not extended the span of life, a slightly rising death rate is in prospect.

The desire for a higher standard of living, the adversity of economic conditions and the increasing knowledge of contraceptive measures are some of the principal factors which are partially responsible for the declining birth rate. One of the most serious outgrowths of this trend is that of declining elementary school enrollments. \* Between 1920 and 1940 elementary enrollments in Miner county declined 48.1 percent--from 1,980 to 1,027 pupils. By 1940, well over half of all rural schools enrolled 10 or fewer pupils. While loss of population through migration was partially responsible for the decline in enrollment, it appears that the falling off of the birth rate has been the chief factor. (A more complete discussion of this problem may be found in Rural Sociology Pamphlet No. 20, The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Miner County.)

\* Pamphlet No. 20.



Figure 7. Age Distribution of the Farm Population in Miner County, 1930 - 1938



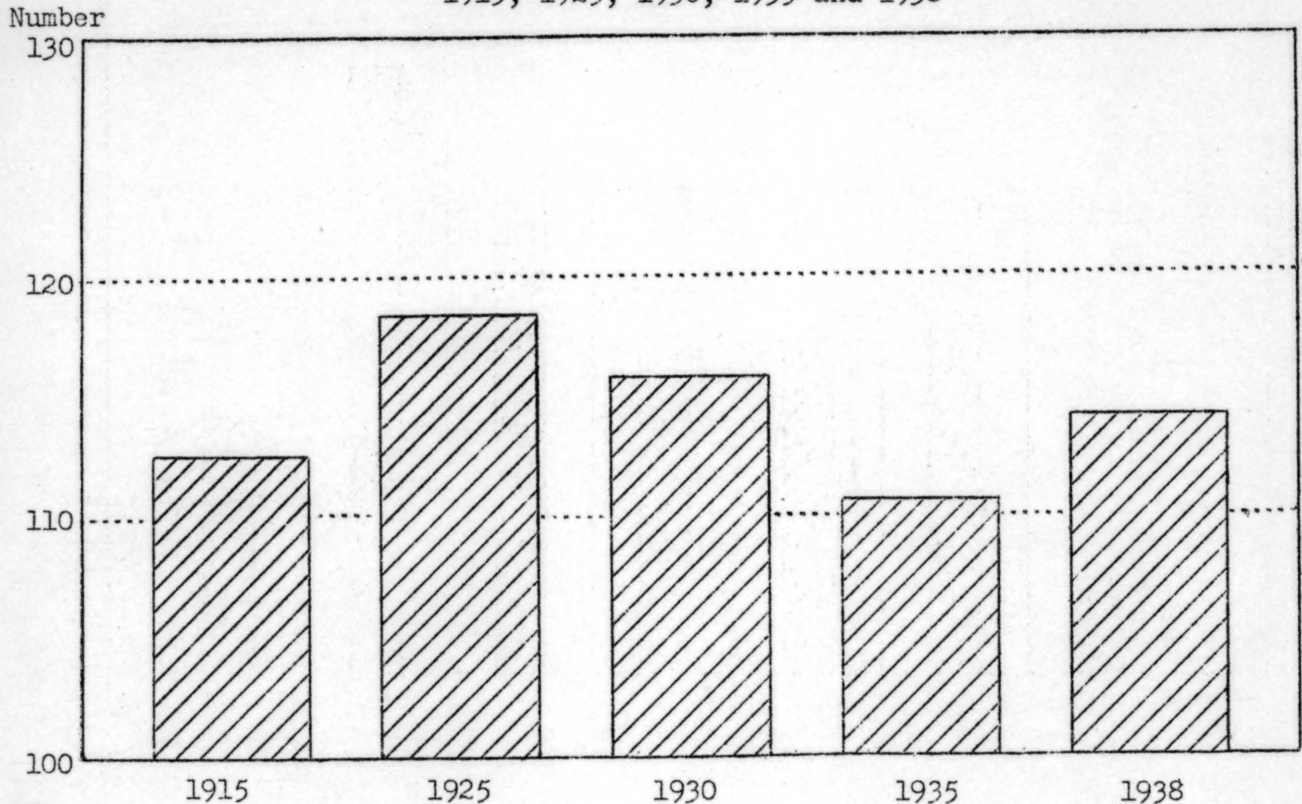
Source: U. S. Census Reports and Farm Security Records

The above chart indicates that the age distribution of the farm population changed considerably between 1930 and 1938, the proportion in the younger groups declining and the proportion in the older groups increasing. The decline in the proportion of the population from 10.5 percent to 7.3 in the 0-4 age-group, and from 25.1 percent to 22.5 in the 5-14 year age-group, was due to the drop in the birth rate; outward migration, especially of young persons; and an increasing number of aged due to the maturing of the population. The proportion of persons age 45-64 in the farm population of Miner county increased from 14.4 percent of the population in 1930, to 19.8 in 1938. An aging population, extension of the expectancy of life for the younger age groups, and a declining number of persons in the younger age brackets are factors responsible for the increased proportion in the older age groups.

These changes in the age distribution will have a number of significant social consequences. The most significant result of a decrease in the number of children is the dwindling of elementary enrollments, calling for a reorganization of the existing school structure. The increase in the numbers and proportion of the aged will probably necessitate an extension of old age assistance to a larger number of people; a lessening of population mobility, an increase in church membership, and a greater conservatism in tastes, habits and public opinions.

It should be born in mind that Figure 7 shows the age distribution for the farm population only. According to the 1930 census the proportion of persons 65 years of age was almost three times as large in the town population as in the farm population. On the other hand, the proportion of persons in the younger age group is smaller in the town than in the country. The preponderance of old people in towns is probably due to the fact that the town is a convenient and rather inexpensive place in which to live.

Figure 8. Males Per 100 Females in the Farm Population of Miner County, 1915, 1925, 1930, 1935 and 1938



Source: U. S. and State Census Reports, and Farm Security Records

A high ratio of males to females is always characteristic of predominantly rural areas. The farm population contains a larger proportion of males than females because farm work is essentially a man's occupation. The very nature of farm work makes it easier for a single man than a single woman to operate a farm. The hiring of male farm laborers also tends to increase the proportion of males in farming areas. With approximately 74 percent of its gainfully employed male population engaged in agricultural pursuits, it is not surprising to find more males in the Miner county population than females. A higher ratio of males to females was true in Miner county in pioneer days when many of the settlers were young unattached males. With the passing of the settlement period, the sex ratio has tended to become more equal. In the Miner county farm population, the ratio of males per 100 females decreased from 118.2 in 1925 to 114.3 in 1938. For the county as a whole, both town and country, the number of males per 100 females decreased from 116.7 in 1890 to 106.2 in 1935.

In the towns of Miner county there is a trend toward more women than men. In 1925 there were 97.0 males per 100 females in Miner county towns. In 1935 there were 97.6. The towns attract a larger number of women and girls because of the greater number of opportunities for employment.

A reduction in the number of foreign-born has automatically tended to equalize the sex ratio, since it is the foreign-born segment of the population which has by far the largest ratio of males to females. The declining proportion of persons engaged in agriculture and the growth of towns has also tended to reduce the sex ratio. The trend toward equality in the sex ratio appears to be a healthy one, since it will probably lead to a greater number of normal families, slow down excessive mobility, and bring a greater number of refinements into every day living.



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The loss of farm population in Miner county during the past decade has been accompanied by an increase in the size of farm units. This trend seems to be a healthy one, pointing to a better man-land adjustment.
2. The increasing tenancy rate constitutes both an economic and a social problem. Economically, tenancy, because of the usual short term lease, makes for a lack of responsibility on the part of the tenant which is reflected in mining of the soil and abuse of farm buildings. From a social standpoint, all organizations tend to be weaker and more unstable in tenant dominated areas than in localities where owners predominate. There is nothing inherently evil in tenancy itself but rather in the usual way in which it is administered. The policy of short term leases is undoubtedly the worst feature of tenancy as it now exists. It is felt that long term leases of the sliding-scale type would do much to alleviate the present social problem caused by tenancy.
3. Although the proportion of the foreign-born in Miner county is declining, nationality culture patterns continue to influence the lives of those of foreign descent. This is particularly true with respect to the family, neighborhood groups and church preference. The existence, distribution, and characteristics of various nationality groups within the county should not be overlooked in any program of land use planning. It is particularly important to have adequate representation from each nationality group on the planning committee.
4. The falling birth rate has resulted in a declining number of persons in the lower age groups, with consequent reduction in elementary enrollments. Because of the excessive per pupil costs for operating schools for only a few pupils, declining enrollment has recently been recognized as a real problem. Several suggestions for the solution of this problem are offered in the Rural Sociology Pamphlet Number 20, The Declining Enrollment Problem in the Schools of Miner County.

Ageing of the population, a low death rate, and a decrease in the number of persons in the younger age groups through the operation of a lower birth rate and outward migration of younger people have resulted in a considerable increase in the proportion of persons in the older age brackets. As a high percentage of these persons are without financial resources, it appears likely that the number of persons needing old age assistance will increase. Attention should also be given to the building of more, smaller, and cheaper apartments to accommodate old people; to the prevention of diseases that afflict the aged, and to providing leisure time activities and facilities for oldsters.

5. The number of males per 100 females seems to be approaching equality in the farm population of Miner county. This is probably a healthy condition since the trend toward equality in the sex ratio will tend to increase the number of normal families; retard excessive mobility; and introduce more refinements into everyday life.